

**AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION:**

*Please replace the paragraph beginning on column 4, line 53 and ending on column 5, line 7 with the following amended paragraph:*

According to an especially preferred embodiment of the invention, a system is provided which permits precise joining of thin floor panels having, for example, a thickness of the order of 3 mm and which at the same time provides a tolerance-independent smooth top face at the joint. To this end, the strip is mounted in an [equalising] equalizing groove which is countersunk in the rear side of the strip panel and which exhibits an exact, predetermined distance from its bottom to the front side of the strip panel. The part of the strip projecting behind the groove panel engages a corresponding [equalising] equalizing groove, which is countersunk in the rear side of the groove panel and which exhibits the same exact, predetermined distance from its bottom to the front side of the groove panel. The thickness of the strip then is at least so great that the rear side of the strip is flush with, and preferably projects slightly below the rear side of the panels. In this embodiment, the panels will always rest, in the joint, with their [equalising] equalizing grooves on a strip. This levels out the tolerance and imparts the necessary strength to the joint. The strip transmits horizontal and upwardly-directed forces to the panels and down-wardly-directed forces to the existing subfloor.